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Cc: []

From: CN=Hanady Kader/OU=R10/O=USEPA/C=US

Sent: Mon 9/12/2011 4:43:01 PM

Subject: Cantwell aims to halt Alaska gold mine
http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/politics/2016180120_goldmine12.html

Suzanne in my unit sent this out to a few people today and I'm forwarding on to you as well.

http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/politics/2016180120_goldmine12.html

Monday, September 12, 2011

Cantwell aims to halt Alaska gold mine

Sen. Maria Cantwell fears toxic wastes from the proposed Pebble Mine project could hurt Washington state's wild salmon population.

WASHINGTON — In a high-stakes battle that pits gold and copper against fish, members of Congress are scrapping over a plan to build one of the world's largest open-pit mines in southwest Alaska. Fearing that toxic wastes from the mine could hurt the wild salmon population in Washington state, Democratic Sen. Maria Cantwell intends to enter the fray Monday. She plans to ask the head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to consider using the Clean Water Act — if necessary — to stop the proposed Pebble Mine project on Bristol Bay.

Cantwell, a second-term senator and a member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, will become the first senator to issue such a call. She'll face opposition from Alaska Republican Rep. Don Young, who already has introduced a bill that would strip the EPA of its authority to halt the project. While supporters are excited about the mine's potential to create thousands of jobs, environmental groups and other critics worry that the project would have a devastating impact on wildlife, including seals, caribou, moose, grizzly bears and migratory birds. The bay supplies nearly half of the world's annual sockeye-salmon harvest.

Opponents of the mine say it could dump up to 10 billion tons of toxic waste in the heart of the Bristol Bay watershed. And they say the sheer scope of the project — up to 2 miles wide and 1,700 feet deep — would be certain to hurt animals that depend on the habitat.

Cantwell is making her request as the EPA conducts a scientific analysis of the proposed mine that's expected to be released this fall.

If she's successful, she'll help thwart a project that could result in the extraction of more than 107 million ounces of gold and 80 billion pounds of copper from a 150-square-mile site.

In a draft of a letter that she plans to send to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, Cantwell says she's been contacted by thousands of Washington state residents who have expressed concern about "the potentially catastrophic and widespread long-term impacts" of the mine, which she described as "the world's largest man-made excavation."

The mine would capitalize on one of the world's largest concentrations of gold, copper, silver and molybdenum, a mineral that's mixed with steel to provide resistance to heat. The project is proposed by The Pebble Partnership, which includes Northern Dynasty Minerals and mining giant Anglo American. With the mine requiring permits from at least 67 state and federal agencies, officials with the partnership say it would be environmentally responsible and thoroughly reviewed before any metals are extracted.

According to its website, the partnership would make sure "that all of the areas disturbed by exploration are returned to their full capability and usefulness."

The mine has sparked a fierce advertising campaign in Alaska as local residents gear up for a vote related to the project in October. Last month, the Alaska Supreme Court approved a ballot initiative that would restrict permitting of any large project that could harm salmon runs.

In her letter, Cantwell says that wild salmon populations around the globe already are "disappearing at an alarming rate" and that Bristol Bay is one of the only remaining undeveloped salmon habitats.

And she says the issue is particularly crucial to Washington state's economy, with Bristol Bay providing \$113 million a year for its commercial fisheries.

"Nearly a thousand Washingtonians hold commercial fishing permits in Bristol Bay, supporting thousands more fishery jobs in my state," Cantwell says in the letter.

Opponents of Cantwell's plan want to make sure that the EPA doesn't try to use the Clean Water Act to stop the mine.

"Projects in Alaska and across the country have been shut down or delayed time and time again by the EPA, which serves only as an extension of the administration's anti-resource development stance,"

Young, a member of the House Natural Resources Committee, said when he introduced his legislation in January.

Cantwell is welcoming the EPA's scrutiny, saying it will be crucial "to have a science-driven independent process evaluating the potential risks" of the mine.

"Should scientists determine that pollution from a large-scale development in the Bristol Bay watershed could have unacceptable adverse impacts on water quality and the fish stocks that depend on it, I would support efforts to prohibit or appropriately restrict such activities," including by using the Clean Water Act, Cantwell wrote in her letter.

Many conservation and environmental groups, including the Sierra Club and Trout Unlimited, oppose the project as well.

Last week, they got a boost from 17 Seattle restaurants that marked a "Dine for Bristol Bay" campaign, serving Alaskan salmon and contributing a portion of the week's proceeds toward efforts to stop the mine.